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SUBJECT: ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL: MAYORS OF ATHENS AND
PIRAEUS TACKLE THE INTRACTABLE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHARLES RIES. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Municipal elections brought a change of leadership this January in the Greek capital of Athens and the nearby port capital of Piraeus. The two neighbors share common problems, including a mounting trash crisis due to the lack of available landfill. Athens' center-right New Democracy Mayor Kaklamanis is the more politically experienced; he ran on a "can-do" platform that stressed action, not words. Piraeus' Mayor Fasoulas -- from opposition PASOK -- has less experience: four years as a PASOK MP after a stellar basketball career. Nevertheless, he appears determined to tackle tough infrastructure development issues and to quietly buck some of the city's communist legacy. In meetings with the Ambassador, both stressed the importance of good relations with the U.S., including an impetus for economic development. END SUMMARY.

ATHENS MAYOR TOUTS "MUNICIPAL" DIPLOMACY

¶2. (C) In his meeting with the Ambassador on February 6, new Athens Mayor Kaklamanis emphasized the importance he placed on good relations with the United States. He agreed with the Ambassador on the importance of "municipal" diplomacy: "There is much our cities can and should learn from each other." Kaklamanis recalled his "very interesting and substantive" meeting recently with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley to discuss what Athens had learned from hosting the 2004 Olympics. Kaklamanis said he had also been approached by the Mayor of Los Angeles, who was apparently looking for similar advice, and asked the Ambassador whether being in contact with both would put Athens in a difficult position vis-a-vis these two important U.S. cities. Ambassador explained that the U.S. Olympic committee would make a decision on which city the U.S. would put forward to the IOC as a candidate city; Kaklamanis should not feel as though he has to choose between them.

AIMING TO SOLVE ATHENS' TRASH CRISIS

¶3. (C) Ambassador asked Kaklamanis about the serious and well-publicized difficulties Athens was facing in trash disposal as the sole regional landfill facility reaches (and exceeds) its capacity. Kaklamanis (who had previously served as Minister of Health), emphasized his determination to contribute, at the end of his long political career, to the city in which he was raised. It was realistic to aim for perhaps two or three major accomplishments; solving Athens' trash disposal problems would most probably be one of these. Ambassador offered to help assemble background information and points of contact in the U.S. on solid waste issues.

AMBASSADOR BRIEFS ON EMBASSY ANNEX CONSTRUCTION . . .

¶4. (C) Ambassador thanked Kaklamanis for the city's continuing support for the Embassy Annex construction. The

Annex is the first new Embassy construction since 1961, when the current building designed by Walter Gropius was dedicated. He invited Kaklamanis to the Annex inauguration ceremony, expected to be held in May, which the Mayor enthusiastically accepted in principle. Ambassador outlined plans to turn an area immediately west of the new construction into a park, partly through significant contributions of Embassy Athens staff volunteer time. Kaklamanis welcomed this initiative, and said he would like to make certain that it is given the support from the Mayorality that it deserves. In this vein, he asked the Ambassador to send him a formal letter outlining plans for the creation of the green space.

AND KAKLAMANIS PROMISES CITY SUPPORT FOR EMBASSY SECURITY

15. (C) Kaklamanis stressed the importance he attached to ensuring the safety of the Embassy and its community. In response to the Mayor's offer of help in this regard, Ambassador noted the Embassy will be asking for improved lighting in the side streets near the Embassy. This would reduce the potential for terrorists to approach the Embassy under the cover of darkness. Kaklamanis promised to look into responding to the Ambassador's request.

CONCERN OVER CONSTRUCTION OF NEW MOSQUE

16. (C) Ambassador asked Kaklamanis for an update on the construction of a new mosque in Athens announced by former Mayor Dora Bakoyannis. He said the USG supports this initiative, but noted the importance of taking care of people -- such as Roma -- who would be displaced by the new building. Kaklamanis said displacement was a concern, but not his top one. Rather, he was giving thought to local reactions of the primarily Christian population to an annual

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influx of Muslims to the Mosque area during Ramadan. He estimated these numbers at approximately 200,000 people, a large number. To reduce the potential for resulting problems, Kaklamanis said he was considering construction of a second mosque outside of Athens to draw off some of the potential visitors. (Note: Kaklamanis did not explain how he planned to realize this vision and overcome possible objections of the other -- unspecified -- municipality in which the second mosque would be built.)

PASOK MAYOR OF PIRAEUS: LOOKING FOR INVESTORS

17. (C) Piraeus Mayor Fasoulas told the Ambassador that their February 2 meeting was the first official visit by an American Ambassador to the Mayor in 17 years. He expressed regret for the RPG attack on the Embassy January 12, saying the act "humiliated the whole country." Ambassador underscored it was an attack not just on the U.S., but also on Greece. What was important was not the attack, but to maintain our bilateral record of positive cooperation. One area where we could work together: promoting port visits to Piraeus by U.S. navy ships. Beginning two years ago, we had increased the number of ship visits to Greece; among these, the USS Saipan was the largest USN vessel ever to be berthed pierside in Piraeus, where its 700 sailors were able to visit the city. DATT pointed out that in 5 ship visits to the city there had been no liberty incidents. In fact, ship personnel had engaged in volunteer projects in the city during their stay. Ambassador told Fasoulas that it was our aim to have some three-five ship visits to Piraeus harbor each year -- which would have clear economic benefit for the city. Fasoulas welcomed the initiative, though he questioned whether he would be able to publicly visit the ship himself, given the ideological objections of Piraeus' still-vocal communist voters.

18. (C) Fasoulas focused on plans for redevelopment of the city; the Ambassador mentioned Barcelona's success, adding that Piraeus had much the same potential. Fasoulas agreed.

Fasoulas explained that he planned to work with nearby municipalities -- including Athens -- in an effort to resolve the trash crisis. "Garbage has no political party," he said wryly; the two mayors would try to convince the government to look at alternatives and supplements to landfill such as enhanced recycling and incineration plants. Fasoulas was also interested in attracting private capital for tourist attractions, including an aquarium akin to that in Atlanta. Fasoulas also planned to dock a replica of an ancient Greek ship ("trireme") in Piraeus harbor, both as a tourist site and to improve the harbor's appearance.

COMMENT

19. (C) On paper, the two mayors could not be more different. Kaklamanis has a long record in ND politics and is a former minister. Fasoulas, of PASOK, is a former basketball player who, as an MP from 2000-2004, brought his expertise to the organization of the Athens Olympics. Elected in part through his popularity as a sportsman, he has since appointed advisors also drawn from the sports world who literally see eye to eye with him. While Fasoulas is still cautious as he learns the municipal ropes, he and Kaklamanis share a determination to see real change in their cities. They have already met once, in full camera glare, to discuss the garbage crisis -- a sign of bipartisan pragmatism that is rare in Greek politics. Both are well-disposed to the U.S., and their responses to our requests on Embassy security and port visits suggests that these are mayors we can work with effectively in future.

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